Technical Report Documentation Page

1. REPORT No.

2. GOVERNMENT ACCESSION No.

3. RECIPIENT'S CATALOG No.

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE

Laboratory and Field Evaluation of Nuclear Surface Gages for Determining Soil Moisture and Density

5. REPORT DATE

January 1964

6. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION

7. AUTHOR(S)

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8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT No.

9. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS

State of California
Department of Public Works
Division of Highways

10. WORK UNIT No.

11. CONTRACT OR GRANT No.

13. TYPE OF REPORT & PERIOD COVERED

12. SPONSORING AGENCY NAME AND ADDRESS

14. SPONSORING AGENCY CODE

15. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

Presented at the 43rd Annual Meeting of the Highway Research Board Washington D.C. January 13-17, 1964

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17. KEYWORDS

18. No. OF PAGES:

50

19. DRI WEBSITE LINK

http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/research/researchreports/1964-1965/64-14.pdf

20. FILE NAME

64-14.pdf

75
3537

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS
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William G. Weber, Jr.*

SYNOPSIS

A laboratory evaluation of the nuclear surface gages for determining soil moisture and density was conducted using eight soils from various areas of California. A calibration curve was developed for each soil and all calibration curves compared. The volume of soil being measured was determined. The reproducibility and other characteristics of the nuclear gages were studied. The nuclear gages were used on ten projects under construction. The nuclear readings were compared to conventional tests. The results of this evaluation program indicated that individual calibration curves would be required for the various soils encountered.

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INTRODUCTION

The advent of the nuclear age has resulted in the application of radioactive materials to many new methods of non-destructive testing. In the late 1940's the petroleum industry was experimenting with the use of neutrons to measure the oil content of oil bearing sands, and the density of underground formations by gamma ray backscatter. In 1949-1950 results of studies in measuring subsurface soil moisture and density with radioisotopes were reported by Cornell University. During the mid 1950's work was done by various investigators in the development of gages to measure moisture and density from the surface of the soil, which resulted in the development of the surface nuclear moisture and density gages discussed in this paper.

The density gages used in the evaluation program herein reported use the Compton backscatter-absorption principle. The Muller-Geiger tubes used in this equipment measure all energy levels of gamma radiation reaching them. Other available gages have a means of screening out the lower energy gamma rays and counting only a selected region of the gamma spectrum. Another type of gage uses the principle of transmission of gamma rays. The results of the work herein reported should only be applied to the Compton-absorption type gages that have pickup tubes to record all levels of gamma radiation.

From 1954 to 1958 the Materials and Research Department of the California Division of Highways made use of radioactive materials to determine change in moisture and density of foundation soils on several highway projects. From 1959 to 1961 attempts were made by the Department to use the gages, herein referred to as Instrument "A", on various highway projects. The densities indicated by the nuclear surface gages ranged from zero to fifteen pounds per cubic foot higher than those determined by sand volume tests when the manufacturers calibration curve was used. Upon the manufacturer's suggestion, a new calibration curve was obtained in the laboratory using soil compacted in a large mold. This new calibration curve was about five pounds per cubic foot higher than the manufacturer's calibration curve and indicated that a deviation in density of more than ± five pounds per cubic foot could be expected with the nuclear density gages. The moisture gage indicated results within reasonable agreement with the conventional test methods.

Several operational studies that were made during this period were in general agreement with the manufacturer's recommendations. The following two items were found to be of importance:

1. Seating of the gage so as to have complete contact between the soil and gage was found to be extremely critical. Seating the gage on a thin bed of sand was adopted as standard practice.

2. Calibration of the subsurface nuclear probes indicated that the density calibration was shifted about 15 pounds per cubic foot between dry soil and soil at a moisture content of approaching 100%.

Controversy existed over the use of these surface nuclear gages for fill compaction control so a carefully controlled study was undertaken, starting in October 1961. This study consisted of two phases: a laboratory evaluation, and a field evaluation. During the early portion of the laboratory evaluation another manufacturer's gage was purchased and is referred to as Instrument "B".

LABORATORY EVALUATION

Test Program

The laboratory testing program had the following objectives:

I. To obtain calibration curves for various California soils. To combine these calibration curves into one calibration curve. To determine the accuracy of the various calibration curves. To determine if the density calibrations are affected by the moisture content of the soil. To obtain moisture calibration curves.

II. To determine how reproducible the nuclear results are from day-to-day on a standard.

III. To determine the effective volume of the soil being measured by the nuclear gages.

IV. To conduct special studies on performance of equipment.

Part I

The calibration curves were obtained by compacting each of eight soils in a steel mold two feet in diameter and one foot in depth. See Table No. 1 for the soils used. The soil was compacted in the mold by drop hammers and an electric compaction hammer.

The soil sample was air dried when received. A series of tests was run on this air dried sample at two or more densities. Water was added to the soil to bring the soil moisture content to about one-half the optimum water content, and the soil was then mixed and stored several days in sealed containers. Another series of tests was then performed with the soil at this moisture content at two or more different densities. Water was then added to bring the moisture content of the soil near the optimum and the above procedure repeated.

The nuclear moisture and density readings were then obtained by setting the probes on the soil surface. A minimum of eight nuclear counts were obtained within 250 counts of each other. These counts were averaged and this value used as the nuclear reading.

A sand volume test was performed in the area tested by the nuclear probes. On several occasions up to three sand volume tests were made on the upper one-half foot of the soil in the mold and up to three sand volume tests were made on the lower one-half foot of the soil in the mold. This was to determine the uniformity with which the soil was being compacted in the mold. A comparison of the sand volume and mold densities is shown in Figure No. 1.

Considerable difficulty was encountered in obtaining agreement between the densities as determined by the mold weight and volume of soil and the sand volume test. This resulted in a side study of the uniformity of the soil compacted in the mold and the accuracy of the sand volume test.

Oven dry moistures were obtained from two or more samples of soil from the mold. The average moisture content of the total soil in the mold was then calculated in pounds of water per cubic foot of soil.

Part II

To determine the reproducibility of the nuclear readings, two standards were established. One was on the concrete floor in the work area, and one was on a block of wood that was sealed so as to prevent loss of moisture. Readings were periodically taken on the surface of these standard throughout the test program. Marks were placed upon the surface of these standards so that the probes were always placed at the same location. Three counts were then obtained that agreed within 2 percent.

Part III

The depth to which the density probes effectively measure the density of the soil was determined in two ways.

A block of wood six inches thick was attached to the bottom of the mold with a thin sheet of iron on top to protect the wood. A series of readings on the wood block was taken. Successive one-inch layers of soil were compacted in the mold and nuclear readings obtained on each layer. The volume and weight of soil in each layer was determined to insure that a uniform density was being obtained.

The second method was to construct one to three-inch layers of concrete or soil in boxes 12 by 18 inches in size. The nuclear density probe was suspended in air and a count rate determined. Then each box of soil was placed on a pair of supports and a count rate determined.

Part IV

Several miscellaneous studies are included in this program. The stability of the pickup tubes was studied by means of standard counts and plateau curves. The general performance of the equipment was also evaluated during this testing program.

The affect of the thickness of the sand used for seating of the probes was investigated. A count rate for a spot on the concrete floor was determined. Various thicknesses, 1/8 to 1/2 inch, of sand were placed over this spot. Count rates were determined for each thickness of sand.

Another study was the influence of objects near the probes. Count rates were determined with a clear space at five feet or more around the probes. Various objects were then placed near the probes and count rates determined without moving the probes.

Discussion of Results

Density Calibrations

An important consideration in any calibration work is the accuracy of the standard used and the accuracy to which the equipment being calibrated will measure a change in the standard. In the density calibration program, two independent densities were determined: (1) the average density of the soil in the mold, (2) the density of the center portion of the soil in the mold by a sand volume test. They will be designated as mold density and sand volume density in the remainder of this portion of this report.

A study of the density variation within the mold was made by performing several sand volume tests on the upper and lower halves of the soil in the mold and determining the density of chunk samples of the soil. Although the soil was compacted in equal soil weight lifts with equal compactive effort per lift, large variations were found between the density in the upper half and lower half of the soil in the mold. The density of the two halves of the mold was then determined for all tests by two methods: (1) the volume of soil in the mold by measurement of its height and weight of soil, (2) sand volume test. These tests indicated that wide variations did occur between the top and bottom halves of the mold. Therefore, two series of readings were obtained each time the soil was compacted in the mold; one on the top half and one on the bottom half.

Figure No. 1 shows a comparison of sand volume and mold densities using one-half of the depth of the soil compacted in the mold. These comparisons are mainly on the moist soils as we were unable to obtain sand volume tests on the dry and/or loosely compacted soils. A distribution plot of the differences is included in the lower right-hand corner of Figure No. 1. The sand volume tests tended to indicate slightly higher densities than the mold. The average difference is ±0.8 pounds per cubic foot. The standard deviation is 2.0 pounds per cubic foot.

The conclusions from this study were that the density variation within the mold was about two pounds per cubic foot from point to point from the average mold density. The indications are that the sand volume test was accurate to one to two pounds per cubic foot.

Calibration curves for each soil were determined using each of the two densities, sand volume and mold, as the standard density. Figure No. 2 shows a plot of the data using the mold density as the standard density. Also the equations of the curves were calculated and are shown in Table No. 2. The average and standard deviations are also included in Table No. 2. For comparison, all of the points for different soils were plotted on one plot and a calibration curve obtained. See Figure No. 3.

The data indicate that the standard deviation, where individual calibrations for various soils are used, will be of a magnitude of one to three pounds per cubic foot. Using one minute readings, the expected standard deviation from random radiation will be of a magnitude of one and one-half pounds per cubic foot. This would indicate that with both of the gages tested in this study, densities could be obtained to two to three pounds per cubic foot accuracy without difficulty, where individual calibrations are obtained for each soil tested.

The individual test points were within a band of 15 to 20 pounds per cubic foot when one calibration was used for all soils. The standard deviation when using one calibration curve for all soils tested, was about four to five pounds per cubic foot for both instruments.

The distribution of the points using one calibration curve for all soils and a separate calibration for each soil are shown in Figure No. 4. Using the 90 percent criteria, 90 percent of the readings will be within seven pounds per cubic foot when one calibration curve is used for all soils and 90 percent of the readings will be within 3½ pounds per cubic foot when separate calibration curves are used for each soil. The 90 percent criteria for a comparison of the mold and sand volume densities indicated that the results will be in agreement within ±3 pounds per cubic foot 90 percent of the time. To obtain a reasonable accuracy with the density probes, a calibration is required for each soil encountered.

Moisture Calibration

The moisture calibrations are shown on Figure No. 5 for all soils tested. Six of the soils are along one calibration curve and two along a different calibration curve that is parallel to the main calibration curve. A Differential Thermal Analysis was performed on the soils and Soils No. 4 and 5 were found to be serpentine soils high in hydrous magnesium silicate. The high magnesium content of these two soils is believed to be the cause of the high amount of slow neutrons produced.

The moisture content determinations had an average error of 0.6 pounds of water per cubic foot, and the standard deviation was 0.8 pounds of water per cubic foot. The distribution of the points for the moisture determinations are shown in Figure No. 5. The data indicates that 90 percent of the readings are within one pound of water per cubic foot of the moisture content indicated by the calibration curve. This one pound of water per cubic foot variation will result in a one percent error in moisture at a dry density of 100 pounds per cubic foot and 0.8 percent error in moisture content at a dry density of 125 pounds per cubic foot.

The moisture content of a soil can be accurately determined by means of the surface gage. One calibration curve will generally be accurate for most soils however, checks must be made to determine that no elements are present that will shift the curve as occurred with Soils No. 4 and 5.

Effect of Moisture on the Density Calibration

The previous work with the subsurface probes indicated that there is a shift in the density calibration curve from a dry soil to a soil at about 100 percent moisture content. It was not known if this effect upon the density readings was significant at lower moisture contents.

A study of the data in this series of tests, does not indicate that a measurable shift in the density calibration curve occurs with a change in moisture content. It was apparent that moisture contents below 20 percent do not affect the density calibration curves within the limits of accuracy of this testing program.

Reproducibility of Readings

It was desired to determine how consistent the nuclear readings of a standard were over a period of time. There has been no difficulty in obtaining check count rates in a few hours time, however, the Instrument A standard count had been previously observed to vary greatly in a few weeks period of time.

To determine how consistent the readings are, two standards were obtained and reading taken on these standards two or three times a week over a three months period of time. The distribution of these readings are shown in Figure No. 6. The range in density or moisture represented by the range in readings is shown on each plot.

The range of readings obtained indicate a difference in density of about 9 pounds per cubic foot. This is a surprisingly large random variation in indicated density. Previous work had indicated that there was a large variation in standard count rates with the Instrument A density gage with time. It had been hoped that the use of the count ratio would correct these random variations; however, it does not appear to do so.

A statistical analysis considering random radiation, indicates that the one minute readings used in this study should be constant within about 150 counts, or about two pounds per cubic foot. The standard varied less than one pound per cubic foot in density. The seating of the probes was no problem and should have had no significant effect upon the readings. The remaining six pounds per cubic foot variation in indicated density appears to be caused by elements within the equipment.

The moisture determinations indicate a spread of two to four pounds of water per cubic foot was indicated over the three months' period. This range in indicated moisture is about what would be expected from statistical analysis.

To determine the short-time variations, where possible, readings were taken on the compacted soil samples in the late afternoon. The following morning check readings were taken before conducting the sand volume test. These readings all checked within two pounds per cubic foot in density and one pound of water per cubic foot of moisture.

To evaluate the effect of this random variation in apparent density with time, check calibration points on Soils Nos. 1, 3 and 7 were made after obtaining the original calibration curves for these soils. These check calibration points were within about two pounds per cubic foot of the calibration curves obtained two to three months previously. As these check points were within the standard deviation for the calibration curves, it would appear that this random variation in indicated density will not affect the density readings obtained with the nuclear gages.

The significance of this random variation in indicated density of a standard is not clearly understood. There is no significant effect upon the accuracy of the calibration curves obtained. This random variation may well explain the erratic readings occasionally obtained and indicates the need for obtaining check readings by rotating the gages.

The Volume of Influence of the Density Readings

The data from the depth of influence readings are shown in Figure No. 7. The percentage of the total change in count rate is plotted against thickness of material. Where the difference in count rate between the wood block and the soil was used, the curves rise rapidly and show a 50 percent change in count rate at one-half to one inch and a 90 percent change in count rate at two to three inches. The one hundred percent count rate change was taken at the greatest thickness of soil tested. Where the difference in count rate between air and soil was used, the Instrument A and Instrument B gages gave slightly different results. The Instrument B gage indicated a 50 percent count rate change at one-half to one and one-half inches of soil, and a 90 percent count rate change at three to four inches. The Instrument A gage indicated a 50 percent count rate change at about two inches and 90 percent count rate change at about three to four inches.

Theoretically, the effective depth of measurement should be a function of density of the medium being tested. The lower the density, the greater the depth of measurement. While there is a slight tendency for the effective depth of measurement to be larger at lower densities; it does not appear to be a significant factor.

The two methods do not agree on the indicated depths of measurement. The effective depth of measurement was taken as that depth to which a density change of five pounds per cubic foot could be measured. The soil to wood block indicates about two to three inches is the effective depth of measurement, and the soil to air indicates three to four inches is the effective depth of measurement. In the previous field comparisons of nuclear and sand volume densities, the sand volume test was made to a depth of 6 to 7 inches. In the field comparisons, included in this report, the sand volume test was made to a depth of four inches so as to obtain comparable volumes of soil.

Limited work was done to determine the width and length of the area of influence of the nuclear density gage. The measurements were made by placing a square basaltic stone in a soil having a density of 110± lbs. per cubic foot. The top of the stone was about one inch below the surface of the soil. The zone of influence appears to be irregular-shaped, about eight inches in width at the pickup end and three to four inches in width at the source end. The length of the zone of influence appears to be approximately ten inches. These tests consisted of readings with the Instrument A density gage only and with the soil at one density only and with the stone at one depth. These measurements indicate that the zone of influence is in the order of sixty square inches. The volume of soil being measured by the nuclear gages is about one-tenth of a cubic foot.

Standard Counts

The Instrument A density standard counts varied from a high of 17,780 to a low of 15,520 counts per minute in the standardizing box provided for this purpose during this study. This wide range of standard counts is believed to be due to the type of pickup tube used, and is the reason that the ratio system is used with the Instrument A equipment even though one more step is required in the obtaining of the density. The standard count of the moisture probe varied from 15,560 to 15,370 counts per minute. This was considered a stable range of counts per minute.

No difficulty was encountered with the Instrument B gage in obtaining standard counts within 170 counts per minute of the standard count supplied by the manufacturer.

Seating of Gages

The seating of the gages was found to have a major effect on the readings obtained. The problem is to obtain a plane surface upon which to place the gage. An air gap of 1/16-inch was found to increase the counts recorded by about 1000 counts per minute. To overcome the difficulty of obtaining a plane surface on the soil, a thin layer of sand was used to seat the gages.

The results of the studies to determine the effect of the thickness of the sand layer upon the readings are shown in Figure No. 8. As the thickness of the sand used in seating the gages was increased, the count rate increased at a rate of about 5 percent per 1/8-inch of sand. The Instrument A density gage was least affected by the thickness of the sand seat to a thickness of 1/4-inch. This is believed due to the raised portions of the bottom of the gage with the built-in air gap.

These tests clearly indicate the necessity for having a plane surface on which to set the gage. The use of a thin layer of sand to level the surface will result in a small change in reading, however, a thick layer of sand will greatly alter the readings.

The moisture gage readings will also be affected by the thickness of the sand seat.

Objects Near the Gage

The effect of objects near the gage upon the count rates was studied. It was found that the objects had to be within one-half foot from the gage before a measurable increase in count rate could be detected.

The manufacturers recommend that no solid material, that will reflect gamma rays, should be within five feet of the gages, which would prevent their use in confined locations, such as structural backfill. These tests indicate that the gages could be used in confined locations where a clear distance of one or more feet is available around the gage.

Conclusions

The following conclusions can be made from the laboratory work conducted in this report:

1. Using one calibration for each soil will result in 90 percent of the nuclear readings being within about three and one-half pounds per cubic foot; and using one calibration for all soils will result in 90 percent of the nuclear readings being within about seven pounds per cubic foot. The use of a calibration curve for each soil will increase the accuracy of the readings by a factor of about two over using one calibration for all soils.

   Moisture determinations with the nuclear gage can be made with an accuracy of one pound of water per cubic foot. Generally one calibration can be used for most soils, however, a limited testing is necessary to determine that elements are not present that will alter the calibration.
2. The moisture content of the soil did not affect the density calibration curve in the low range, below 20 percent, of moistures used in this study.
3. The effective depth of the density determination is about four inches and the volume of soil being measured is about one-tenth cubic foot.

4. The gages may be used in fairly confined locations without loss of accuracy.
5. Great care must be taken in obtaining a plane surface upon which to set the gages. A thin sand layer can be used to aid in leveling the soil surface, but must be kept less than 1/16-inch thick.

FIELD EVALUATION

Introduction

The second phase of this evaluation program was to use the nuclear gages on existing construction projects. Ten highway projects under construction during the summer of 1962, within one hundred miles of Sacramento, were chosen for this study.

Object

Based upon the results of the laboratory studies of the nuclear gages and the need for information on the field use of such gages the following objectives were decided upon:

1. Compare the densities of soils as determined by the sand volume test and the nuclear gages.
2. Compare the moistures as determined by the oven dry method and the nuclear gages.
3. Determine the relative compaction at each sand volume density location.
4. Determine the variation of soil density in the area of each comparison in No. 1 above.
5. Make other minor side studies that are related to the problem of using nuclear devices in field control work.

Testing Program

A site was selected for each test and leveled off by digging 0.2 foot or more. Nuclear readings of the density were obtained at a given one-foot square area with both of the nuclear gages. The moisture content was measured with one of the nuclear gages at the same location as the density test. In all nuclear testing a one-minute reading was taken with the probe in one direction, then the probe was rotated 90 degrees, maintaining the center of the gage over the same point, and a second one-minute reading taken. If these two readings agreed within 200 counts no further readings were taken. If these readings did not agree within 200 counts the probe was rotated 180 and 270 degrees and one-minute readings taken at each position. If one count deviated greatly, (over 300 counts from the average) it was disregarded and three readings used in obtaining an average count rate for determining moisture or density.

Directly under the location of these nuclear readings a sand volume test was made. The test hole was excavated to a depth of four inches and a diameter to give a minimum volume of one-tenth of a cubic foot. In all other respects the sand volume test was performed according to California Test Method No. 216-E.

Prior to performing the sand volume test four nuclear readings were taken three to five feet from the comparative test site, with both nuclear gages. These four tests were run about 90 degrees apart with the comparative test site as a center. The purpose of these tests was to determine the variation of density around the comparative test site, over an area of about 100 square feet.

The sample of soil removed from the sand volume hole was then placed in sealed cans and given to the field laboratory personnel on the project who then completed an oven dried moisture test and an optimum density test on representative samples. At one location on each day a larger sample was obtained from the area of the comparative test. This sample was mixed on a canvas and two duplicate samples obtained. One was given to the resident engineer for his crew to test in the normal manner and the other sample sent to the Materials and Research Department for testing. Grading, plastic limits, sand equivalent, specific gravity and optimum density tests were then run on these samples. A pint jar sample was obtained from each test site with gradings and sand equivalent tests performed to aid in identifying the soils tested.

Discussion of Results

Nuclear Density Comparison

The results of the nuclear density and sand volume density comparative tests for each project are shown in Figure No. 9 for one nuclear gage. The data from all ten projects are combined into one plot in Figure No. 10. In all of these plots the calibration curves obtained in the laboratory nuclear study were used. The Instrument "A" density probe indicated a deviation range of ± ten pounds per cubic foot from the sand volume test. The Instrument "B" showed a deviation range of ± 15 pounds per cubic foot from the sand volume test. When the density results were plotted for each project separately, on some projects the scatter was small and on others large, see Figure No. 9.

Studying the soil types on each project it was found that test results for each soil type tended to be grouped along a trend line. A new calibration was assumed for each soil type to give the best fit for the points in each of the soil types. The average deviation and standard deviation were calculated using one calibration for all soils and individual calibrations for each soil type, and are included in Table No. 3. The density comparison assuming a separate calibration for each soil type is shown for all projects in Figure No. 11. The range of variation of the nuclear density is about seven pounds per cubic foot compared with the sand volume test when a separate calibration curve is assumed for each soil type.

Using one calibration curve for all soils there was a wide variation in standard deviation from project to project. Using the Instrument "A" gage the standard deviation varied from 2½ to 8½ pounds per cubic foot, and using the Instrument "B" gage the standard deviation varied from 4½ to 17½ pounds per cubic foot. When individual calibration curves are used for each soil type encountered the standard deviation is greatly reduced. Using the Instrument "A" gage the standard deviation varied from 1½ to 5½ pounds per cubic foot and using the Instrument "B" gage the standard deviation varied from 3 to 8½ pounds per cubic foot.

The accuracy of the sand volume test is of concern due to its use as the standard in this test program. The laboratory study indicated that the sand volume test has a standard deviation of about two pounds per cubic foot. The equipment used in performing the field density tests in the field was the same as the equipment used in the laboratory testing, so the standard deviation of the field sand volume tests would probably be of the same order of magnitude as was obtained in the laboratory study.

Considering that the sand volume test is accurate to ± two pounds per cubic foot and with this variation subtracted from the nuclear variation the following accuracies are obtained from the standard deviations. Using one calibration for all soils ± five pounds per cubic foot and using separate calibration for each soil type ± two pounds per cubic foot accuracy are indicated. This would indicate that comparable densities can be obtained with the nuclear probes compared to the sand volume test when a separate and individual calibration is used for each soil type encountered.

Nuclear Moisture Comparison

The comparison of nuclear and oven dry moistures for all projects are combined in Figure No. 12. The nuclear moistures tend to be about one pound per cubic foot of water higher than the oven dry moistures. The moisture as determined by nuclear probes ranges from minus one to plus five pounds of water per cubic foot compared to the oven dry moistures. The average and standard deviations for the moisture determinations are shown in Table No. 4.

The moisture data indicate that moistures of soils can be obtained by surface nuclear probes to within two and one-half pounds per cubic foot using one calibration curve for all soils. Obtaining individual calibration curves for various projects would reduce this range about one pound of water per cubic foot. However, considering the accuracy of the density gages it is felt that this was not necessary in this study.

Variation of Soil Density in a Limited Area

The central control point at each site was chosen arbitrarily by the operators and this site tended generally to be selected where the best instrument "seating" conditions prevailed. The sites for the radial readings could not be chosen arbitrarily as they were controlled by the central point, therefore, the best conditions could not always be selected for instrument seating, etc. Furthermore, since sand volume densities were determined at the central site, the subsurface conditions were known only at that point. At the locations of the radial readings, however, no such tests were made so that it was not known if density-changing factors existed below the surface such as large rocks, wood, debris, air voids, etc.

In the analysis of the data the center nuclear densities were taken as the standard and the deviation of the surrounding densities was determined. The deviations were analyzed statistically for each of the ten projects and individually for both types of nuclear equipment. Although there are not enough points on the individual projects to be entirely significant, the curves generally show a normal distribution. The exceptions to this are found in Project No. 7, which shows no tendency toward a normal distribution curve. It was reported by the operators that the field conditions on this project indicated extreme non-uniformity of soil density.

The distribution curves for the nuclear equipment show a generally good comparison with each other for most of the projects. The data from all projects were combined separately for the Instrument "A" and Instrument "B" equipment and the resulting distribution curves are shown in Figure 13. Referring to Figure 13 it is seen that normal distribution curves are formed and that the curves for the two types of equipment are reasonably comparable.

The values for the combined projects show for the Instrument "A" determined densities an average deviation of ± 3½ pounds per cubic foot, a standard deviation of 5 pounds per cubic foot, and a 90% limit of 8½ pounds per cubic foot. Those determined by the Instrument "B" equipment show an average deviation of ± 4½ pounds per cubic foot, standard deviation of 6½ pounds per cubic foot and 90% limits of 10 pounds per cubic foot. These sets of values, although they differ about one to two pounds per cubic foot, show the wide range of in-place densities that were encountered in a supposedly uniformly compacted soil.

Comparative Maximum Density and Moisture Tests

A total of 36 comparative maximum density and moisture tests were obtained during this study. Compaction tests were made by both project and Materials and Research Department personnel on duplicate samples. The results of the Materials and Research Department compaction test was taken as standard in these studies and the deviation of the project tests was calculated.

The distribution of the differences in densities of the compaction results is shown in Figure No. 14. The average difference was 2½ pounds per cubic foot and the standard deviation 3½ pounds per cubic foot. The 90 percent confidence limit was 6 pounds per cubic foot. This is an unexpectedly large difference in results. During construction this represents the standard to which a contractor is expected to compact a soil. This large variation in the standard would result in a four percent variation in the value of the relative compaction.

The optimum moisture deviations showed an average deviation of 1.2 percent water and a ninety percent confidence limit of two percent moisture. These results are of a random nature. The optimum moisture variations are within the normal limits that would be expected for a compaction test.

Maximum Densities on Each Project

The maximum densities obtained with each sand volume test were compared to determine if it would be feasible to use one maximum density for each soil type as defined by the nuclear calibration curves. The average and standard deviations were calculated using the average density for each soil, see Table No. 5.

The standard deviations varied from 2 to 12 pounds per cubic foot from the average maximum density. This standard deviation could be partially due to the normal variations that would occur in the test for determining the maximum density. A figure of three pounds per cubic foot was assumed as a reasonable allowable standard deviation in the maximum density for a soil to be considered as uniform in regards to density. This three pounds per cubic foot will result in about a two percent deviation in relative compaction.

Twenty-five percent of the soils studied in this report had standard deviations in maximum density of less than three pounds per cubic foot.

Several of the projects contain two soil types. The standard deviation of one soil type may be less than three pounds per cubic foot and the other much larger than three pounds per cubic foot. The use of a single standard maximum density for one soil, and a maximum density test for each field density test for the other soil would be confusing. There was only one project where a single standard maximum density could have been used throughout the project.

It does not appear from this study that the use of one standard maximum density for each soil type on a project is practical.

Conclusions From Field Data

The data clearly indicate that when nuclear equipment is used for soil moisture and density measurements a calibration curve is required for each soil and that more than one calibration curve generally will be required for each construction project. Any hope of speeding up control testing by use of the nuclear surface gages would be seriously handicapped by this limitation. By the use of calibration curves with the nuclear gages for the various soils encountered densities comparable to those obtained by the sand volume test can be obtained. However, the difficulty would be in knowing when the calibration should change. The grading and physical appearance of a soil may not be reliable indications of the need for changes in the calibration for the nuclear probes.

The manufacturer and various users recommend field calibrations; that is, to calibrate the nuclear gages against field density and moisture tests. This means periodically performing field sand volume tests to check the nuclear densities being performed. It appears that this method of using the nuclear gages would still mean using the sand volume test for control and adding a few nuclear tests to obtain a larger number of tests. It is strongly felt that if the nuclear gages are to be used for construction control they should "stand on their own results." This would mean calibrating the gage in the field laboratory and then being able to use the nuclear gages to obtain the relative density directly without further checking. It appears that this would be possible at the present time on only a limited number of projects.

It appears that the nuclear moisture gages will indicate reasonably accurate moistures at the present time.

Use of Nuclear Density Surface Probe for Compactor Studies

During the past years several attempts have been made to use the surface probes in construction operations. One of these studies was to determine the compaction of a soil after various numbers of passes of the roller.

The testing consisted of taking nuclear density tests at the same location on a soil after increasing numbers of passes of a roller. The count rate would decrease as the roller compacted the soil. Making a plot of the nuclear counts versus the passes of the roller, the required number of passes of the roller for compaction of the soil could be determined. The results of two such studies are shown in Figure No. 15.

The count rate decreased rapidly as the first four coverages were placed on the soil. Additional coverages then only slightly decreased the count rate. Since density increases as the count rate decreases, the data indicate that the optimum number of passes of these rollers on a soil would be about four passes.

This demonstrates a possible practical application of the nuclear probes. The increase in density of a given soil mass can be determined as additional compactive effort is applied. If the same soil is tested each time and calibration of the nuclear probe is not required rapid testing can be performed on the same soil mass with only minor delays to the contractor. Testing of the same soil mass each time is possible due to the nondestructive nature of the nuclear testing.

TABLE NO. 1

PROPERTIES OF SOILS USED IN LABORATORY NUCLEAR STUDY

Soil No.	Description	Liquid Limit	Plastic Index	Sand Equiv.	Optimum Density	Optimum Moisture	Specific Gravity +4	Specific Gravity -4	Grading-Percentage of Gravel	Sand	Silt	Clay
1	Sacramento Freeway Soil	24	4	12	121	13	--	2.64		41	38	21
2	American River Sand		NP	97	104	16	--	2.71		96	3	1
3	Sacramento Sand and Gravel		NP	22	144	6	2.70	2.75	64	26	6	4
4	Vallejo Base	46	36	21	106	18	--	2.56	56	25	11	8
5	Crushed Rock		NP	80	134	7	2.79	2.80	71	25	3	1
6	Fresno Soil		NP	20	129	10	--	2.69	12	49	31	8
7	San Diego Soil	31	8	25	121	11	--	2.58		75	14	11
8	Eureka Soil	26	11	10	125	12	--	2.65	1	47	22	30

TABLE NO. 2

DENSITY CALIBRATIONS AND ERRORS

Soil No.	USING SAND VOLUME TEST AS STANDARD DENSITY: Equation Calibration Curve	Average Error	Standard Deviation	USING MOLD DENSITIES AS STANDARD DENSITY: Equation Calibration Curve	Average Error	Standard Deviation
INSTRUMENT A						
1	R = 1.635 - 0.00857D	2.2	2.6	R = 1.543 - 0.00783D	2.0	2.9
2	R = 1.573 - 0.00758D	1.7	2.1	R = 1.660 - 0.00836D	1.2	1.5
3	R = 1.584 - 0.00780D	1.0	1.3	R = 1.467 - 0.00696D	1.6	1.9
4	R = 1.965 - 0.01151D	2.2	3.0	R = 1.963 - 0.01155D	2.0	2.3
5	R = 1.828 - 0.01009D	3.1	3.7	R = 1.823 - 0.01008D	2.8	3.3
6	R = 1.501 - 0.00751D	1.9	2.3	R = 1.572 - 0.00812D	2.2	2.6
7	R = 1.131 - 0.00467D	2.0	2.3	R = 0.935 - 0.00336D	3.5	4.5
8	R = 1.795 - 0.01003D	1.2	1.5	R = 1.680 - 0.00904D	1.3	3.0
All Soils	R = 1.569 - 0.00786D	3.0	3.8	R = 1.619 - 0.00833D	3.2	4.0
INSTRUMENT B						
4	C = 19740 - 69.52D	2.7	3.4	C = 21850 - 88.05D	1.6	2.0
5	C = 32910 - 163.61D	1.6	1.8	C = 15030 - 22.50D		
6	C = 20000 - 75.59D	2.3	2.8	C = 20690 - 81.37D	2.7	3.2
7	C = 21490 - 82.27D	1.8	2.2	C = 22120 - 88.80D	1.6	2.0
8	C = 25070 - 116.43D	1.8	2.4	C = 23510 - 102.91D	1.8	2.8
All Soils	C = 21940 - 90.00D	3.5	4.3	C = 20780 - 78.91D	4.1	5.0

TABLE NO. 3

Field Nuclear Study
Summary of Deviations of Nuclear Densities from
Sand Volume Densities of Soils Tested in Field Nuclear Study
Deviation of Nuclear from Sand Volume Test

	Instrument A				Instrument B			
	One Calibration Curve for all soils		Individual Calibration Curve for each soil		One Calibration Curve for all soils		Individual Calibration Curve for each soil	
Project No.	Average Deviation	Standard Deviation	Average Deviation	Standard Deviation	Average Deviation	Standard Deviation	Average Deviation	Standard Deviation
1	6	7	3½	4½	6½	7½	3½	4½
2	7	8	3	4	5½	7	3½	4½
			1	1½			3	3½
3	3	4	2	2½	4½	6	3	3½
4	3½	4½	2½	3	3½	4½	2½	3½
			2½	3½			2½	3
5	6	7	2	2½	8½	10	7½	8½
			4	5½			5½	7½
6	2½	2½	1½	2	5½	5½	2½	4
			2	2½			5	6½
7	7	8½	1½	2½	13½	17½	5½	6
			1½	2			3	4½
8	4	4½	2½	4½	4	5½	4	4½
9	4½	6	1	1½	4	5½	3½	4
			3½	5			3½	5
10	6	7	3	4	8½	10	4	5
All Projects	5	6	2½	3	6	8	4	5

TABLE NO. 4

Summary of Average Deviation of Moisture
of Soils Tested in Field Nuclear Study
Deviation of Nuclear from Oven Dry Moisture

Project Number	Instrument A Average Deviation	Instrument B Average Deviation
1	1½	2
2	1½	2
3	1	3½
4	1	2
5	1	2
6	4	3
7	1	2
8	2	2½
9	1½	2½
10	2	3
All Projects	1½	2½

TABLE NO. 5

Field Nuclear Study
Deviation of Maximum Densities
from the Average Maximum Density
as Determined by California Test Method 216-E

Project No.	Average Maximum Density	Average Deviation	Standard Deviation	90% Confidence Limits	Soil Type
1	113	3	5	6	Silty clay
2	111½	4½	5½	7	Silty clay
	116½	4½	6½	7	Silty sand
3	124½	4½	5	6½	Silty sand
4	130½	2½	3½	3½	Sandy silt
	133½	2½	4	4½	Sand w/graval
5	124½	2	2	2	Sand w/rocks
	122½	3	4½	5½	Clay w/rocks
6	124½	1½	2	2	Silty clay w/rocks
	134	3	4	4	Sand w/gravel
7	140½	2	2½	3	Sand
	124½	5	7½	7½	Clay
8	128	2	2½	4½	Silty sand
9	120	3½	4	5	Silty sand w/gravel
	107	10½	12	13	Silty clay w/rocks
10	112½	3½	5	8	Silty clay

MOLD VERSUS SAND VOLUME DENSITIES

NUCLEAR STUDIES

LABORATORY NUCLEAR STUDY

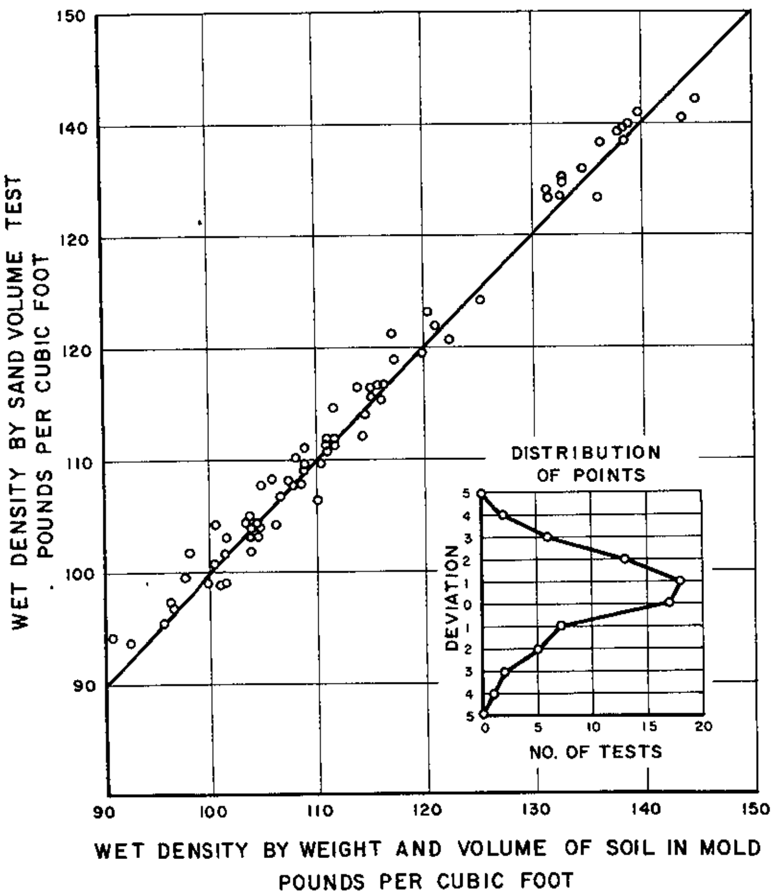


FIGURE 1

LABORATORY NUCLEAR STUDY

DENSITY CALIBRATION CURVES FOR VARIOUS SOILS

USING INSTRUMENT A SURFACE DENSITY PROBE
MOLD DENSITY TAKEN AS STANDARD

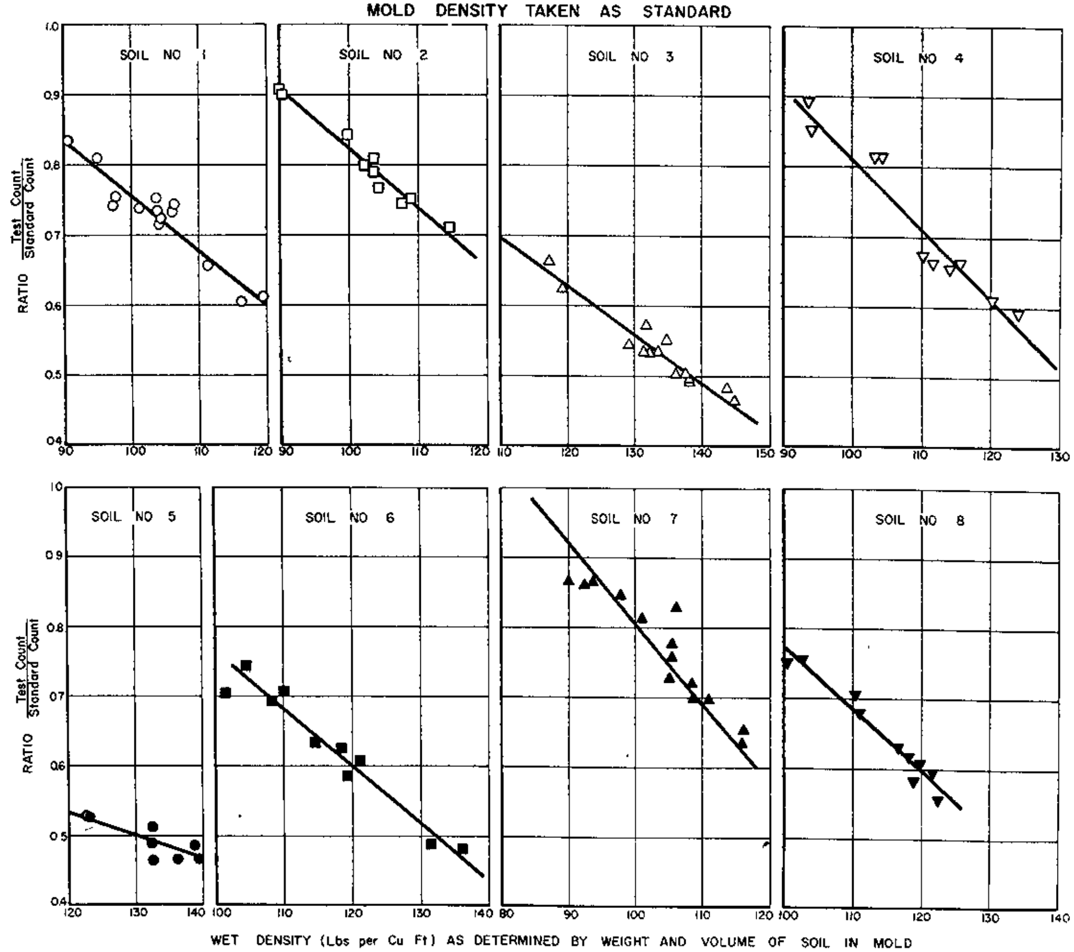
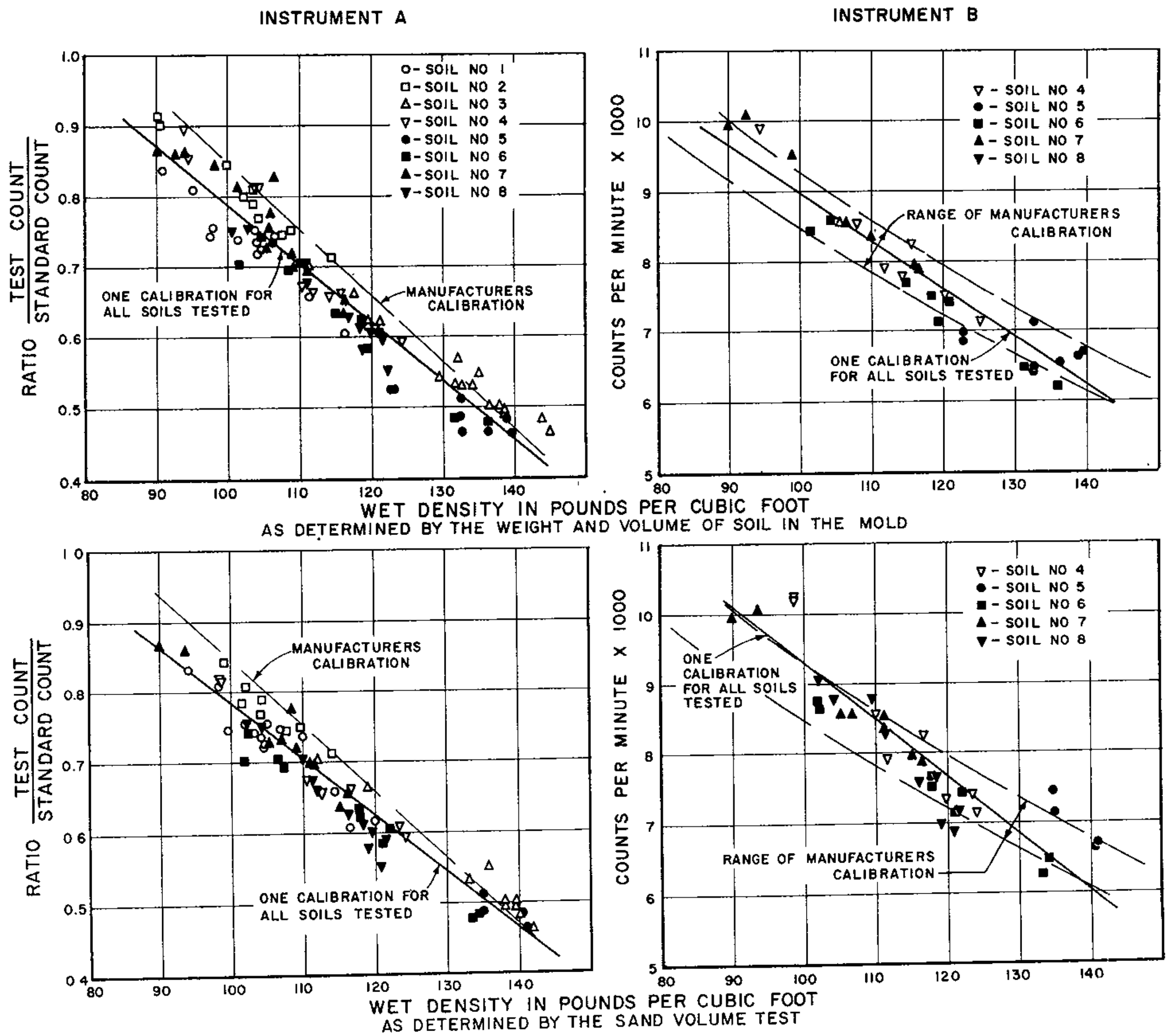


FIGURE 2

FIGURE 3

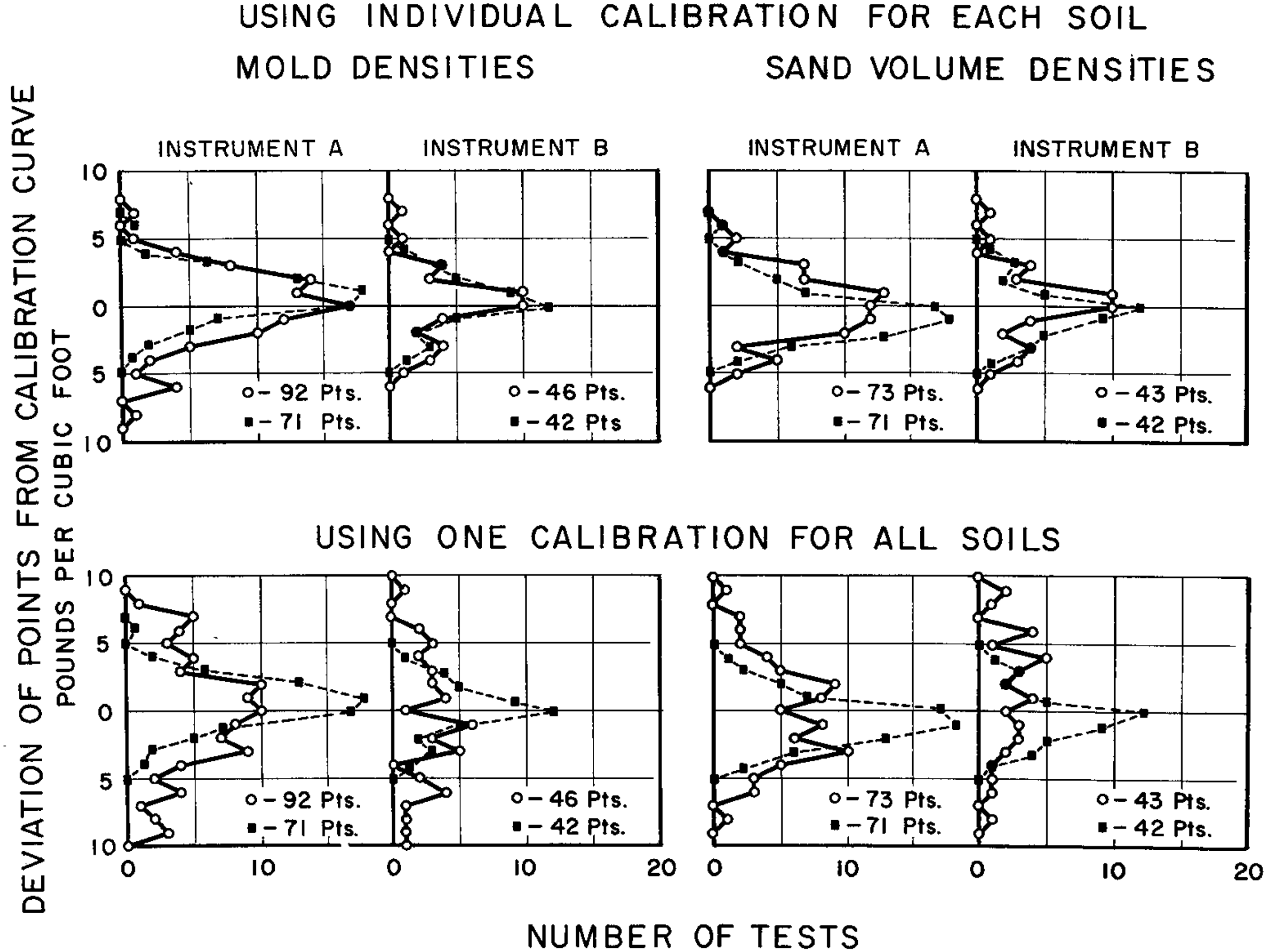
DENSITY CALIBRATION CURVES FOR ALL SOILS TESTED

LABORATORY NUCLEAR STUDY



DISTRIBUTION OF POINTS IN THE DENSITY STUDIES

LABORATORY NUCLEAR STUDY



Solid line - Deviation in density using nuclear equipment.
Broken line - Deviation between Mold and Sand Volume density.

MOISTURE CALIBRATION CURVES

LABORATORY NUCLEAR STUDY

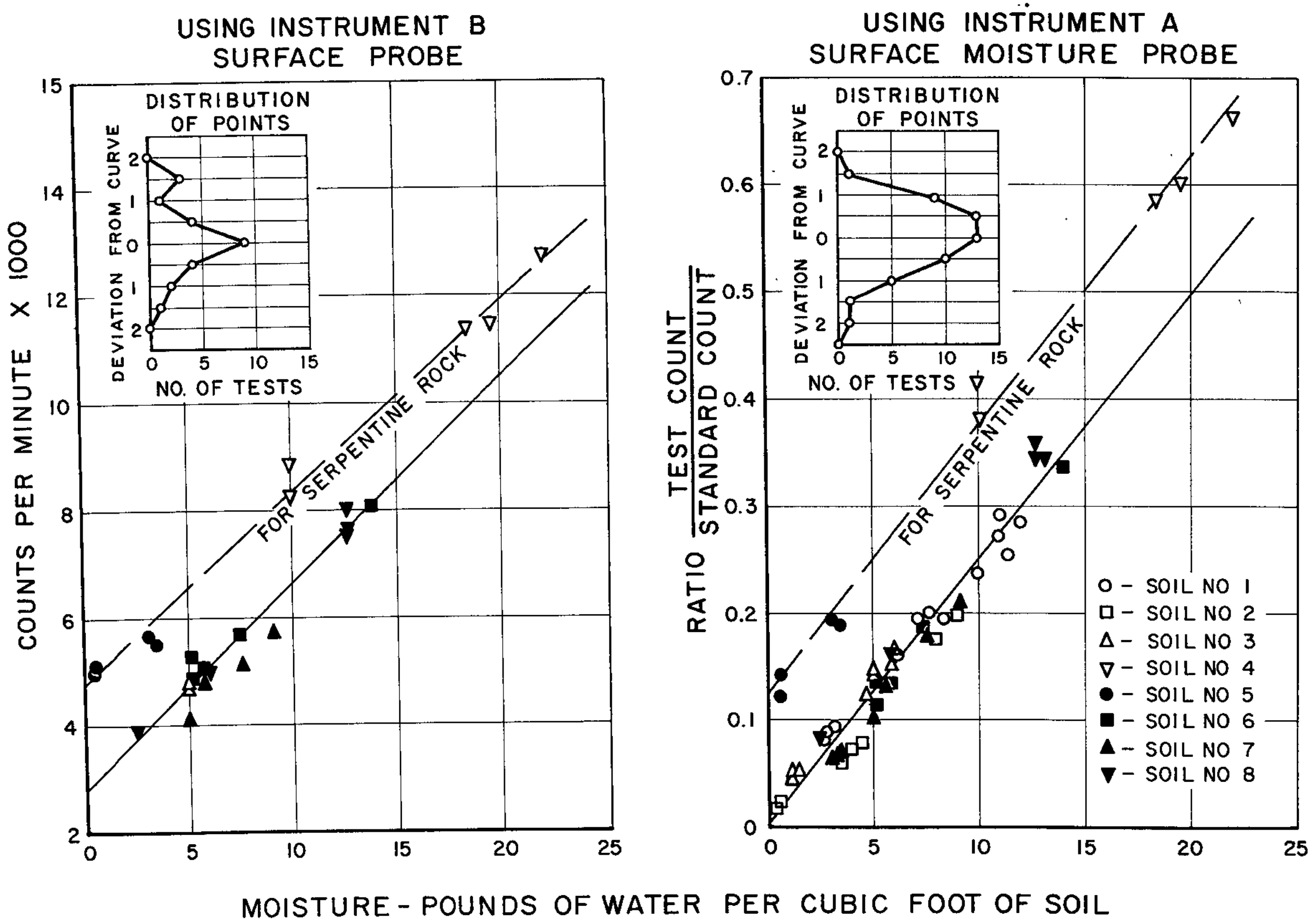


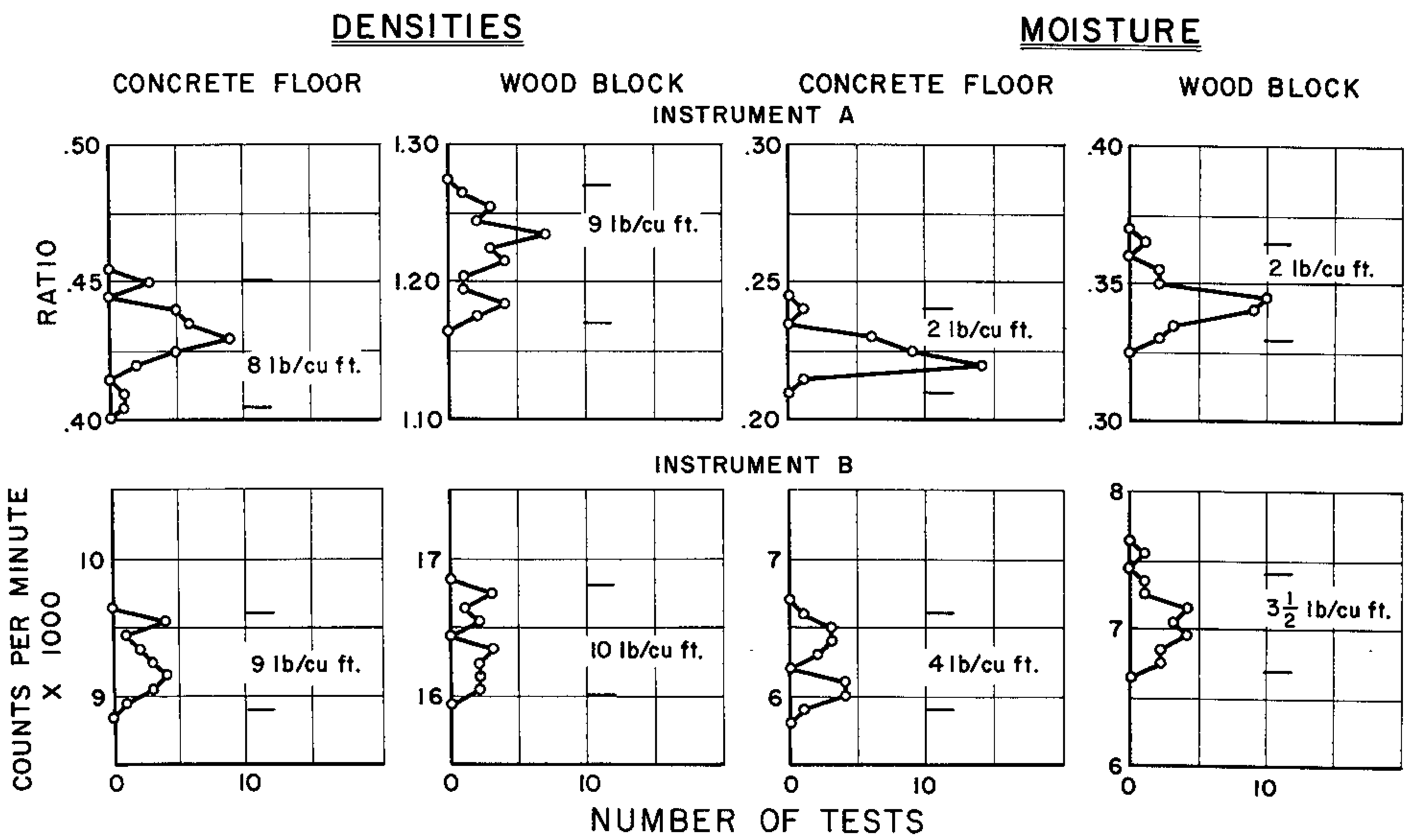
FIGURE 5

FIGURE 6

REPRODUCIBILITY OF NUCLEAR READINGS

LABORATORY NUCLEAR STUDY

DISTRIBUTION OF READINGS OBTAINED IN
A THREE MONTH PERIOD ON TWO STANDARDS



CONCRETE FLOOR : Four inch concrete slab floor in work area.

WOOD BLOCK : Two foot diameter by one and one half foot high block of pine sealed to prevent a moisture change.

DEPTH OF INFLUENCE OF NUCLEAR DENSITY PROBES

LABORATORY NUCLEAR STUDY

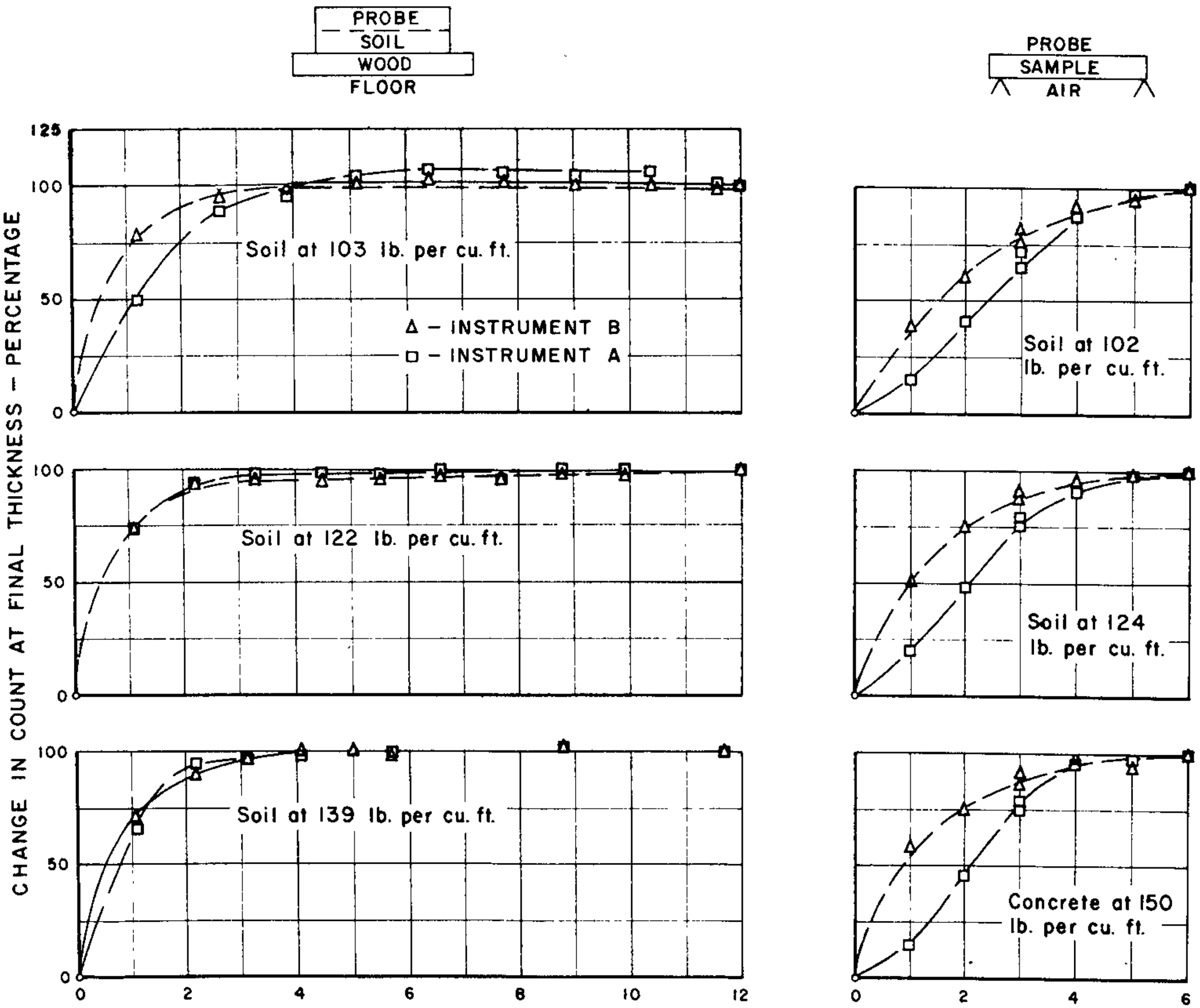


FIGURE 7

EFFECT OF THICKNESS OF SAND SEAT ON NUCLEAR READINGS

LABORATORY NUCLEAR STUDY

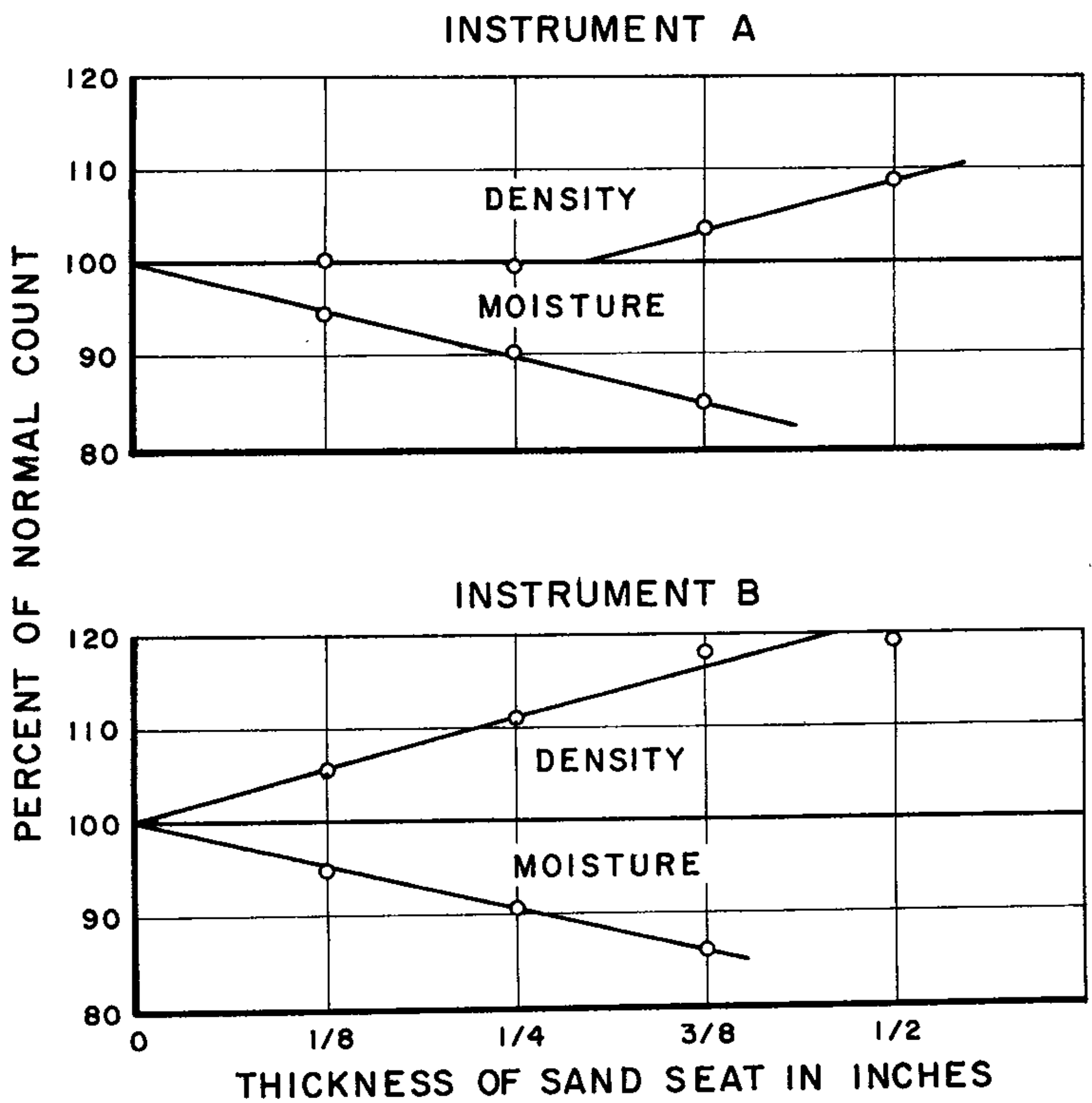


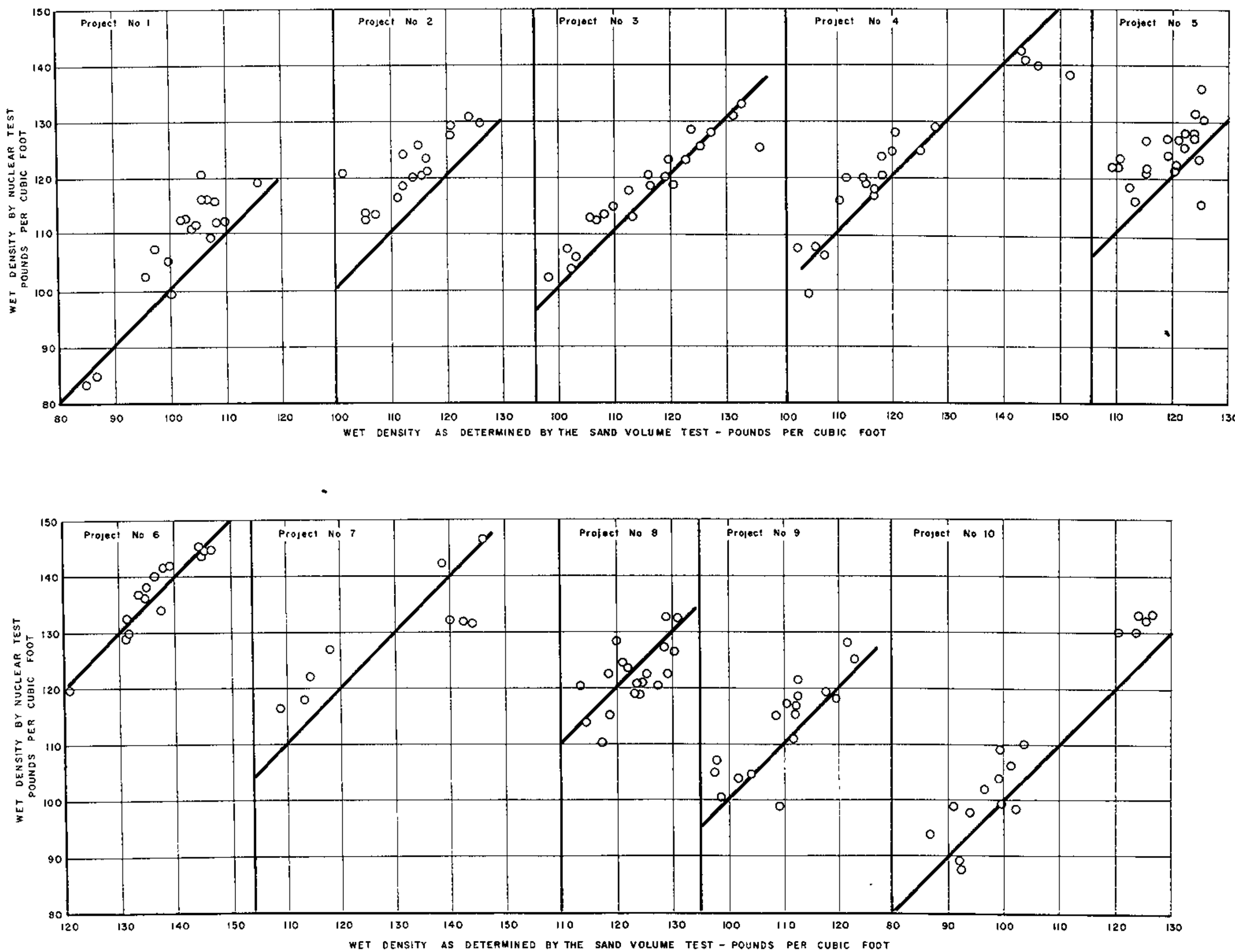
FIGURE 9

FIELD NUCLEAR STUDY

COMPARISON OF NUCLEAR AND SAND VOLUME DENSITIES

ONE CALIBRATION CURVE DETERMINED IN LABORATORY NUCLEAR STUDY FOR ALL SOILS

INSTRUMENT A



COMPARATIVE SAND-VOLUME & NUCLEAR DENSITY TESTS
FIELD SURFACE NUCLEAR STUDIES
DISTRICTS III & X
USING ONE CALIBRATION CURVE FOR ALL SOILS

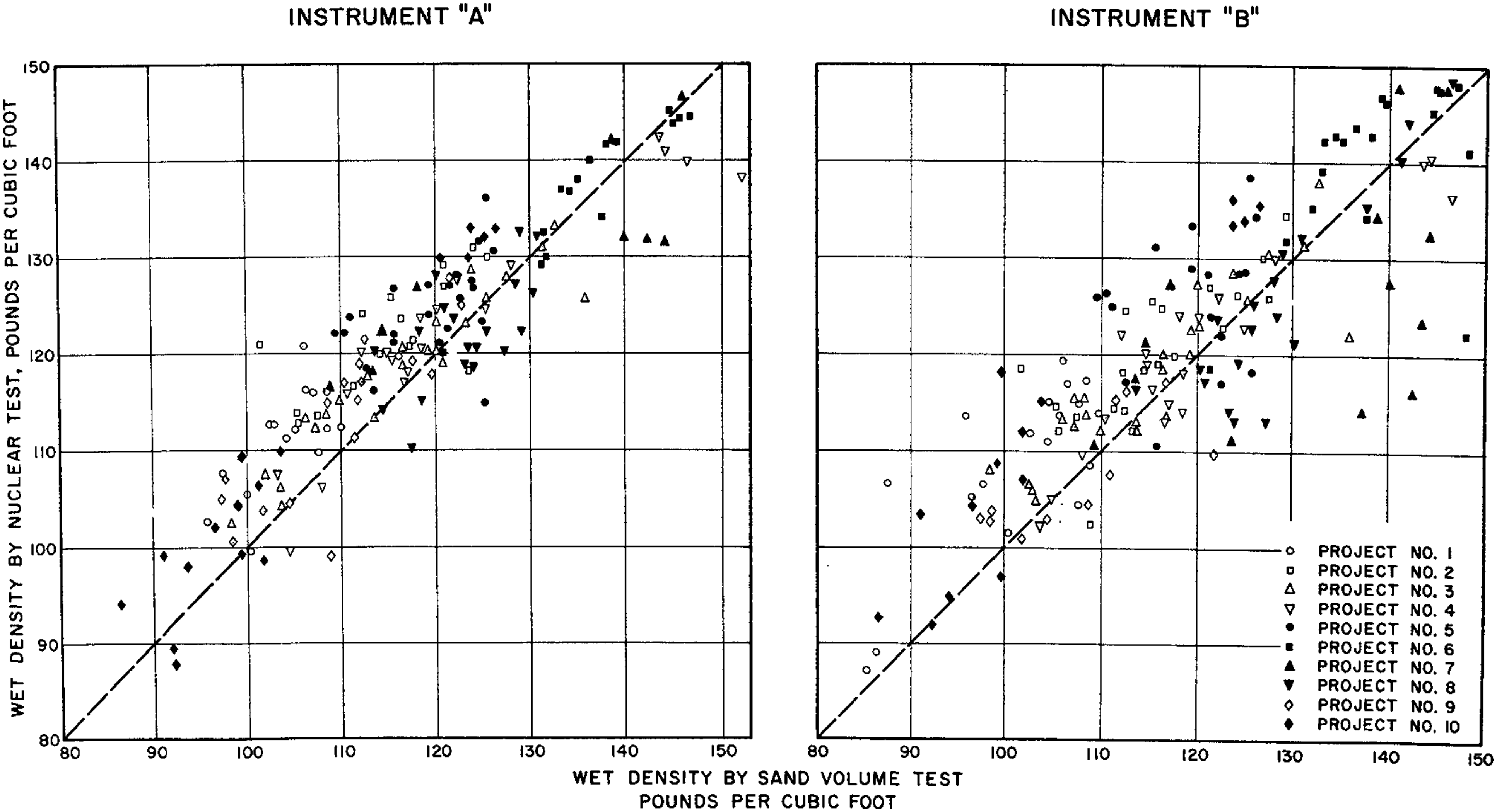


FIGURE 10

FIELD NUCLEAR STUDY

COMPARATIVE SAND VOLUME & NUCLEAR DENSITY TESTS USING INDIVIDUAL CALIBRATION CURVE FOR EACH SOIL TYPE

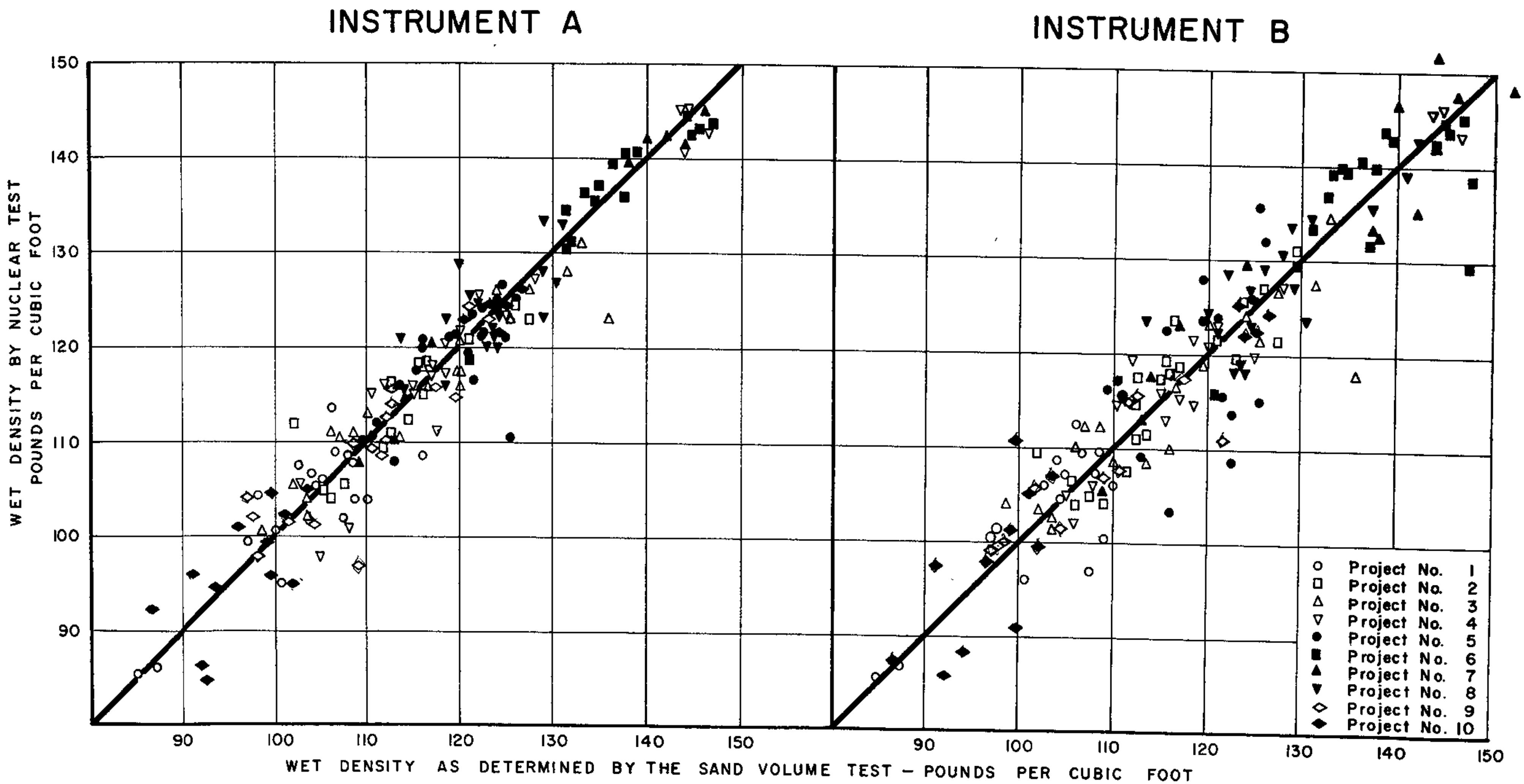
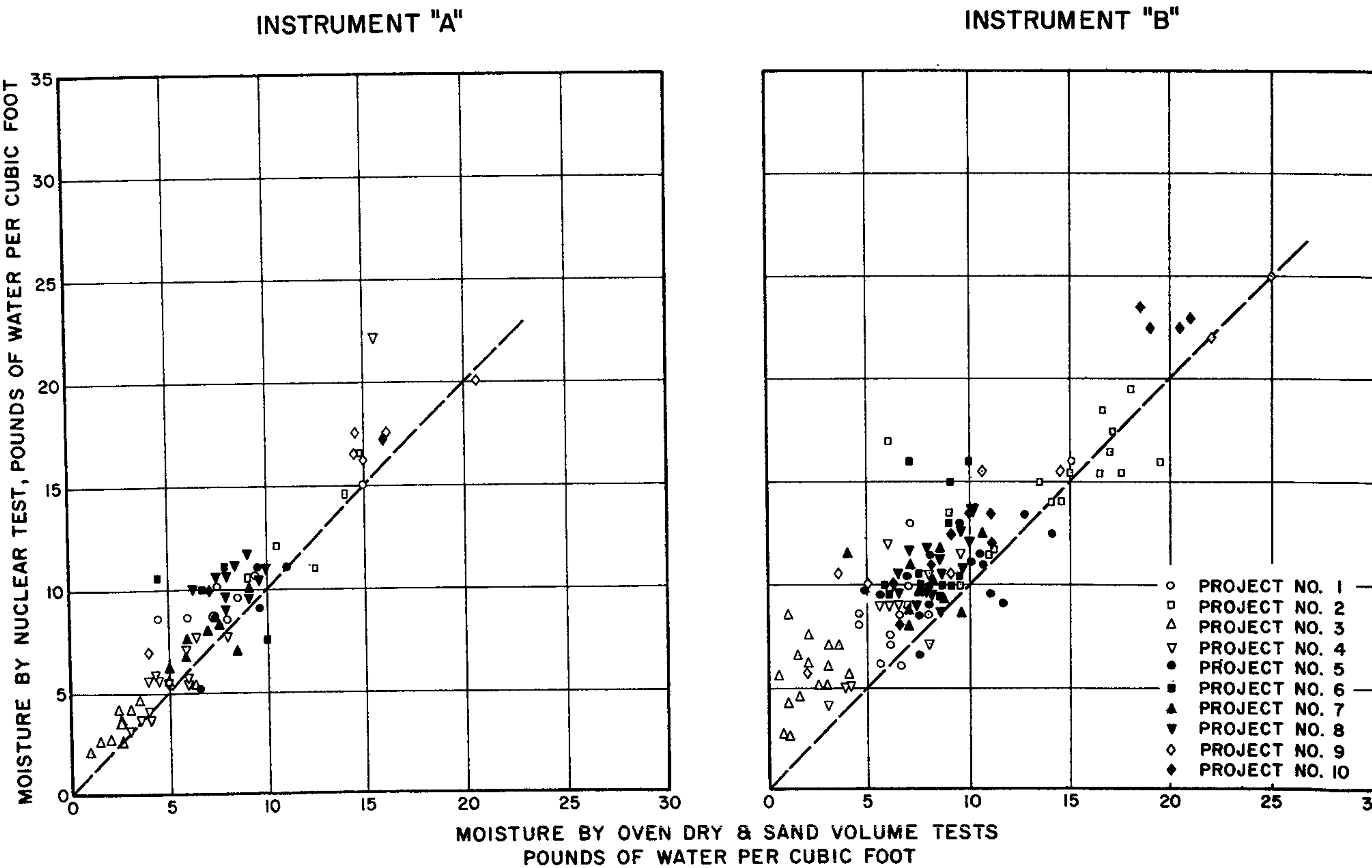


FIGURE II

FIGURE 12

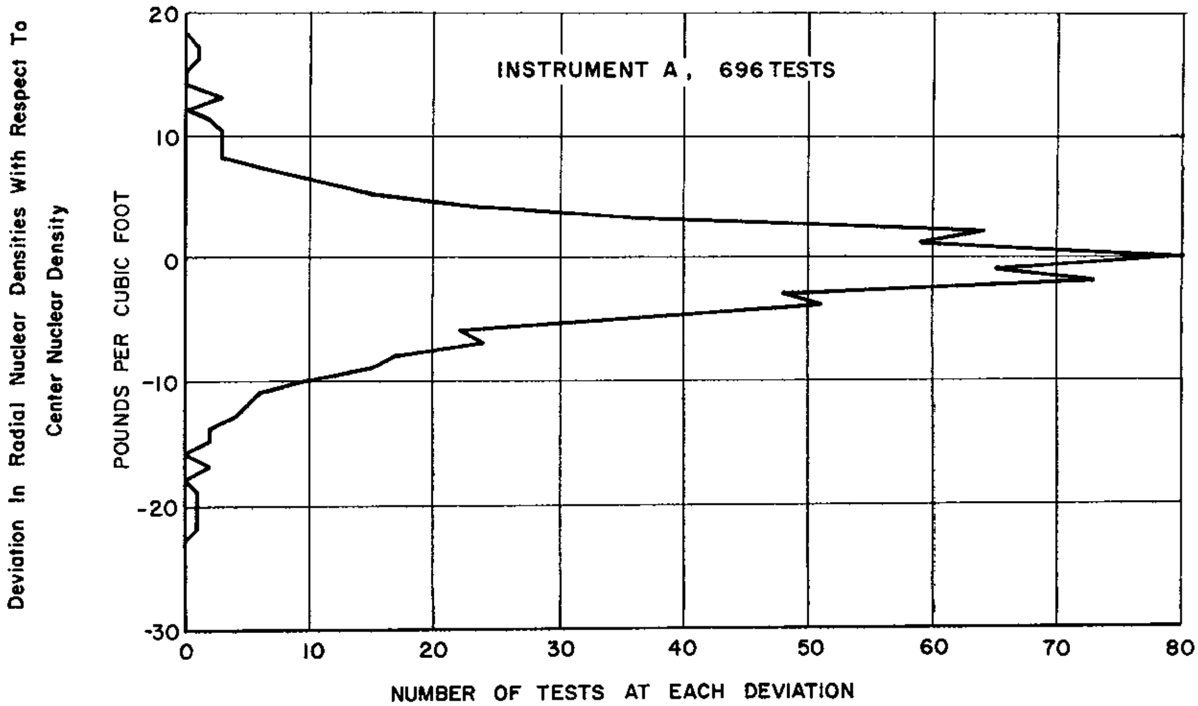
COMPARATIVE OVEN DRY & NUCLEAR MOISTURE TESTS
FIELD SURFACE NUCLEAR STUDIES
DISTRICTS III & X
USING ONE CALIBRATION CURVE FOR ALL SOILS

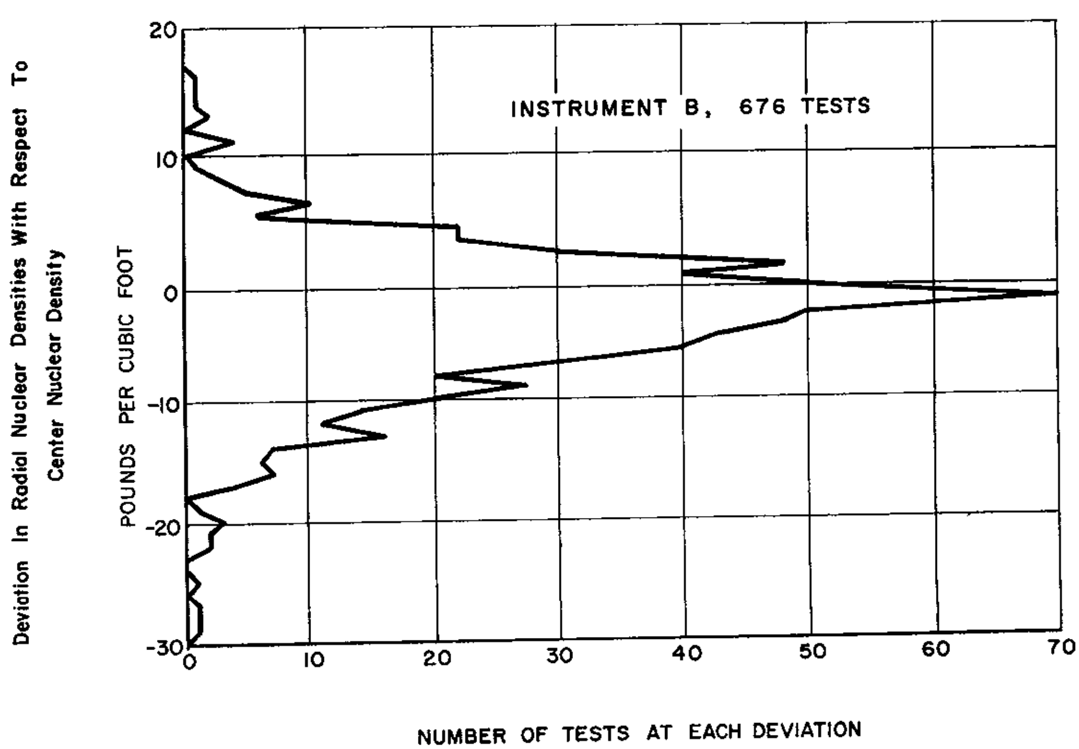


FIELD NUCLEAR STUDY

DEVIATION OF RADIAL DENSITIES FROM CENTER DENSITY

ALL PROJECTS COMBINED





DEVIATION OF OPTIMUM DENSITIES AND MOISTURES AS DETERMINED BY THE DIST. III & X PARTIES & M&R DEPT. NUCLEAR FIELD STUDIES

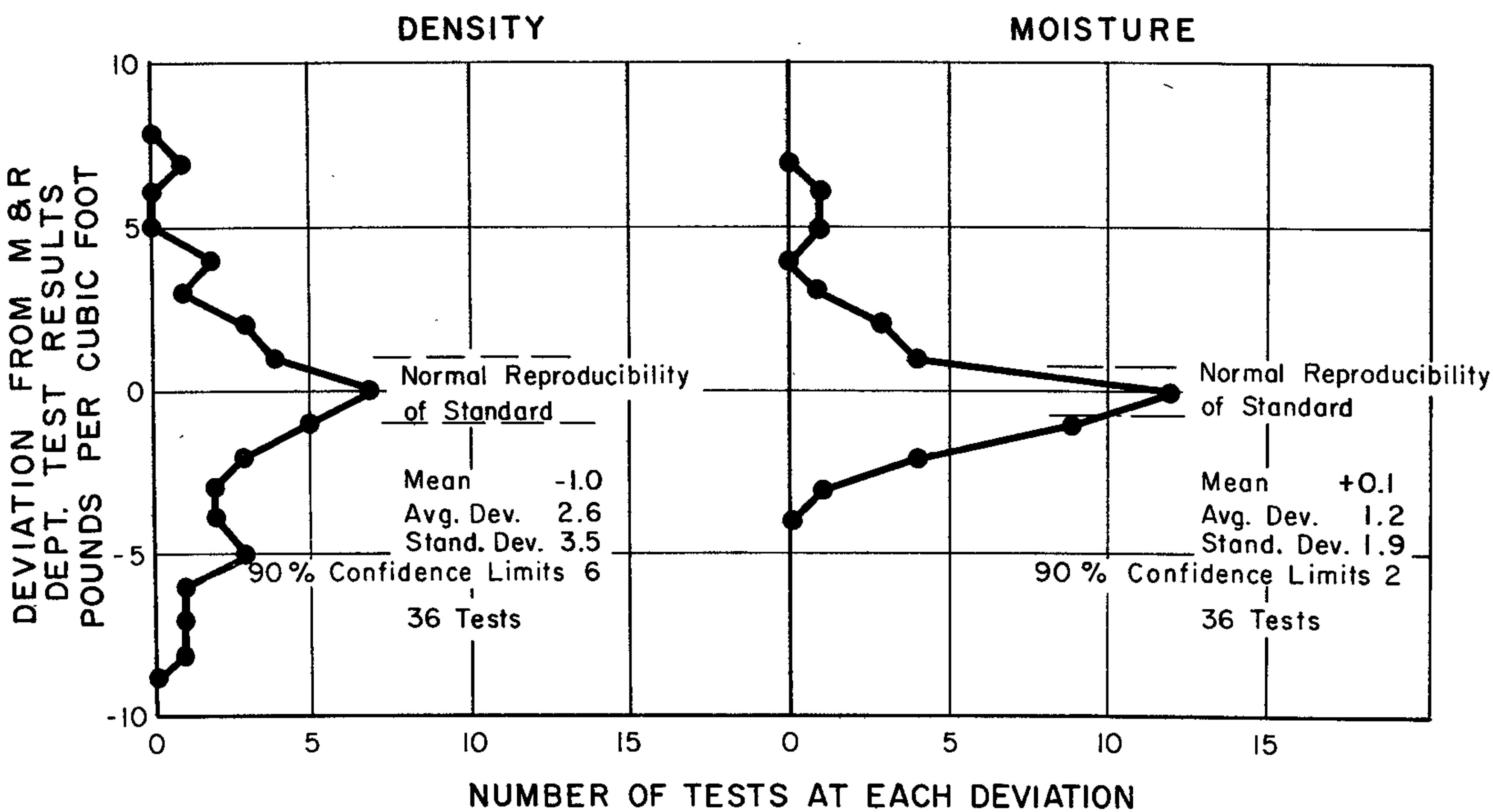


FIGURE 14

FIELD NUCLEAR STUDY

USE OF NUCLEAR SURFACE DENSITY PROBE
IN COMPACTION STUDY